JACOBITE

MODERNITY’S FERTILITY PROBLEM

Nick Land - June 20, 2017 -

Photograph by Amanda Elledge.

The techno-commercial wing of the neoreactionary blogosphere has an obvious fondness for Pacific Rim city states. Singapore, along with Hong Kong (a PRC ‘Special Administrative

Region' which retains significant trappings of autonomy), are regularly invoked as socio-political models. The striking difference between the two societies only confirms the merits of what they share. "If you love minimal democracy capitalist enclaves so much, why not move to Singapore (or Hong Kong)?" is a notably ineffective challenge to this constituency. Those who haven't already fled there – or somewhere else that is in important respects comparable – can only see the prospect of such an exile as a tempting invitation. It's not quite "Go to heaven!" but it's as close as political polemic gets. The asymmetry is decisive. Unlike any concrete approximation to a left-utopian social model that has ever been available, these are societies that incontestably work, with attractions that require no active propaganda operation to support. The right rises because – unlike its enemies – it can find examples of what it admires that aren't agonizingly embarrassing upon close inspection. Seriously, be our guests and look more attentively. The details are even more impressive than the dazzling general impression. This would be a great place to stop, but instead…

…in March 2013, dissident right blogger 'Spandrell' put up a short post on his abrasive but consistently brilliant *Bloody Shovel* site that messed up the narrative in a way that has yet to be persuasively addressed. Entitled 'Et tu, Harry?,' it placed the Singapore miracle in a disconcerting context. Rather than harmonizing with neoreactionary celebrations of the city state's unapologetically selective immigration policy, Spandrell asks:

> *How many bright Indians and bright Chinese are there, Harry? Surely they are not infinite. And what will they do in Singapore? Well, engage in the finance and marketing rat-race and depress their fertility to 0.78, wasting valuable genes just so your property prices don't go down. Singapore is an IQ shredder.*

The accusation is acute, and can be generalized. Modernity has a fertility problem. When elevated to the zenith of savage irony, the formulation runs: At the demographic level, modernity selects systematically against modern populations. The people it prefers, it consumes. Without gross exaggeration, this endogenous tendency can be seen as an existential risk to the modern world. It threatens to bring the entire global order crashing down around it.

In order to discuss this implicit catastrophe, it's first necessary to talk about cities, which is a conversation that has already begun. To state the problem crudely, but with confidence: Cities are population sinks. Historian William McNeil explains the basics. Urbanization, from its origins, has tended relentlessly to convert children from productive assets into objects of luxury consumption. All of the archaic economic incentives related to fertility are inverted.

McNeil summarizes his argument in an online essay considering 'Cities and their

Consequences':

> *Intensified exposure to infectious disease was the traditional reason why cities did not reproduce themselves. […] But it is the cost of raising children in all urban environments, not disease, that best explains why urban populations generally decline without immigrants from rural areas. Wherever adults go off to work in factories, shops and offices, and small children are not allowed to accompany them, who looks after the young? How can they be readied for gainful employment? Public education and pre-schooling are seldom available in urban slums, particularly outside Western countries, but occasionally even within them, too. Grandmothers and elderly neighbors can sometimes do the job, but extended family coherence is not as prevalent in cities, and often such caregivers are not available. Professionals of various descriptions must then be found. That renders the cost of children's upkeep high, and the nurturing that such professionals usually offer rarely matches their large fees. […] Even as children are more expensive in cities, they are less economically useful at an early age. There are few berries to be picked, no small domesticated animals to herd. There is a much longer wait until children can begin to contribute to family income in urban settings.*

Education expenses alone explain much of this. School fees are by far the most effective contraceptive technology ever conceived. To raise a child in an urban environment is like nothing that rural precedent ever prepared for. Even if *responsible parenting* were the sole motivation in play, the compressive effect on family size would be extreme. Under urban circumstances, it becomes almost an aggression against one's own children for there to be many of them. But there is much more than this going on.

Recognition of the modern fertility crisis and the 'far right' – whether in its 'misogynistic' or its 'racist' strains – are not easily distinguishable. The egalitarian axiom, as applied to gender or to ethnicity, comes under critical strain as the topic is pursued. A general theory of the post-conservative right would be productively initiated here.

Feminism has been the first, inevitable target. It is tightly correlated with the collapse of fertility, and is something modernity tends (strongly) to promote. The expansion of female social opportunities beyond obligate child-rearing could scarcely lead anywhere other than to a drastic contraction of family size. The inexorable modern trend to social decoding – i.e. to the production of an abstract contractual agency in the place of concretely determined persons – makes the explosion of such opportunities apparently uncontainable. The individualism

fostered by urban life might, to the counter-factual imagination, have been in some way restricted to males, but as a matter of actual historical fact the dereliction of traditional social roles has proceeded without serious limitation, with variation in speed, but no indication of alternative direction. The radically decoded Internet persona – optionally anonymous, fabricated, and self-defining – seems no more than an extrapolation from the emergent norms of urban existence. Feminist assumptions, at least in their 'first-wave,' liberal form, are integral to the modern city.

Religious traditionalist lamentations in this regard are, of course, nothing new. Christianity – especially under Catholic inspiration – has connected modernity to sterility for as long as modernity has been noticed. A number of crucial factors have nevertheless changed. Since the early years of the new millennium, secular liberals have begun to notice the connection between religiosity and fertility, and to express gathering concern about its partisan political consequences. In a 2009 paper, Sarah R. Hayford and S. Philip Morgan discuss the transition from a traditional discussion of the topic, focused upon differential Catholic and Protestant fertility, to its contemporary mode, subsequent to the convergence of denominational differences, and now mapping more closely onto red / blue state partisan affiliations. Their abstract is worth citing (almost) in full:

> *Using data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), we show that women who report that religion is "very important" in their everyday life have both higher fertility and higher intended fertility than those saying religion is "somewhat important" or "not important." Factors such as unwanted fertility, age at childbearing, or degree of fertility postponement seem not to contribute to religiosity differentials in fertility. This answer prompts more fundamental questions: what is the nature of this greater "religiosity"? And why do the more religious want more children? We show that those saying religion is more important have more traditional gender and family attitudes and that these attitudinal differences account for a substantial part of the fertility differential.*

"Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?" asked Eric Kaufmann in a 2010 book with that name. A peculiar twist in the Darwinian inheritance had begun to bring the heritability of religious attitudes into prominence, and linking it (positively) to the question of reproductive fitness. Those groups previously seen as having been unambiguously vanquished by a triumphant evolutionary science were now subject to an ironic – and from the progressive perspective deeply sinister – evolutionary vindication. This is a story that has still scarcely begun to unfold.

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517112256/https://jacobitemag.com/2017/06/20/modernitys-fertility-problem/[3/26/2023 11:01:33 AM]

A parallel development, compounding the commitment of cultural modernity to imperative sterility, has been the efflorescence of LGBTQXYZ sexual identity politics. Following the decisive progressive victory in the cause of gay marriage, something like a Cambrian Explosion in non-traditional sexual and gender orientations has occurred, turbo-charging the pre-existing feminist critique of normative reproductive sexuality. Here, too, the affinity with profound modernistic inclinations is unmistakable, in a process of introjected brand and niche specialization. The tendency – often supported as an explicit political strategy – is to invert the terms of marginalization, by drowning the reproductive family unit within a hyper-inflated menu of socio-libidinal positions. Fertility is increasingly identified as a conservative eccentricity, legitimately targeted by partisan political warfare. Intense backlash has been among the results (providing fertile ground for the post-conciliatory 'far right').

Oh, but there's more. The truly great transition, implicit in the process of modernity from the start, is marked by the threshold between *domestic* and *global* urbanization. Major cities have always been distinctively cosmopolitan, but for the initial phase of their histories the bulk of their demographic absorption has been limited to their own ethnic hinterlands. *Urbanization* meant, first of all, the conversion of rural populations into city dwellers. In the developing world, it still means this. In the most advanced modern societies, however, domestic rural populations were almost fully consumed, reduced to some negligible fraction of the national total. After this point, the process of population replacement intrinsic to the urban phenomenon from its beginning became inextricably bound to globalization, and trans-national migration flows. Now – which really is *now* – things get interesting.

Politics, by prophetic etymology, is about cities. The inevitability of an emergent 'Alt-Right' in the mass politics of advanced modern societies is already fully predictable from a minimal understanding of how cities work. It is simple delusion to imagine that mere contingency rules here, perhaps under the guidance of particular political personalities. Rather, the urban metabolism – essentially – at a certain phase of its development, generates circumstances overwhelmingly conducive to the eruption of popular ethno-politics. Cities are demographic parasites. They trend intrinsically to a dynamic that – beyond a comparatively definite threshold – *cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic policy of ethnic replacement*.

There is still much hope of coaxing toothpaste back into its tubes. In other words, there is a massive failure to appreciate the profundity and magnitude of the processes underlying the current global crisis. For instance, the incendiary language of migration-driven 'genocide' is not going away. It is bound, on the contrary, to spread, and intensify. The re-emergence of the race topic, and all of its associates, is deeply baked into the modernist cake. Comparative modernity is automatically racialized once global metabolism lends differential (urban/rural) fertility its ethnic specificity. What is unfolding, among other things, is the racial disaggregation of the 'population bomb,' with drastic inevitability. This is not a product of intellectuals, but of the modern process inherently, and all attempts by intellectuals to obstruct

its cultural condensation are hubristically misconceived. "Who, actually, is having kids?" It is a species of insanity to think this question can be strangled in the crib.

So, what's the answer? Does the Alt-Right have one? If so, there's been no sign of it yet. "Burn the cities to the ground" has been floated on Twitter, and no doubt elsewhere, but it doesn't seem obviously practical. That solution has a rich – and especially East Asian – communist pedigree, which the Alt-Right will probably rediscover at some point. It didn't work out in the 1970s, and would be unlikely to perform any more convincingly today.

As the crisis escalates, it can be expected to generate a thread of novel political theory oriented to the question: *How do we make practical and technical sense of social solution searches in general?* Such thinking is going to be necessary. Our great cities pose an ultimate political problem. Eventually, something will be grateful for that.

Nick Land is an independent writer living in Shanghai.

***

Notes:

William McNeil, 'Cities and their Consequences'

Sarah R. Hayford and S. Philip Morgan, 'Religiosity and Fertility in the United States: The Role of Fertility Intentions'

Share this:

Related

Hong Kong's Exit
September 23, 2017
In "Bruce Gilley"

The Landscape of Innovative Governance
March 23, 2018
In "Top Sidebar"

French Leave
June 12, 2019
In "Politics"

TAGS DEMOGRAPHICS FEMINISM FERTILITY MODERNITY NEOREACTION NICK LAND S. PHILIP MORGAN SARAH R. HAYFORD WILLIAM MCNEIL

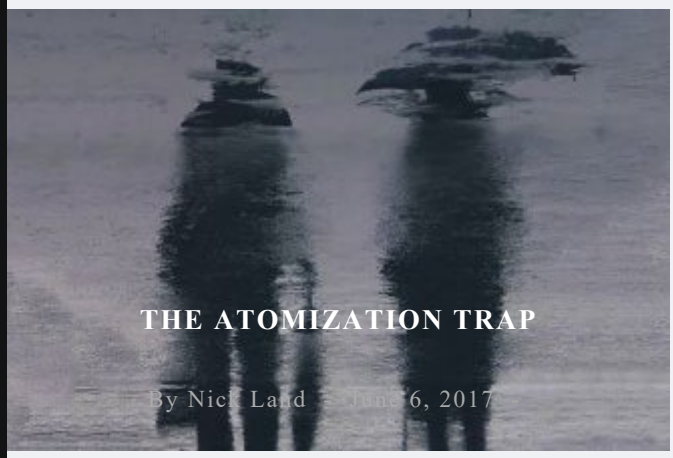
Previous Article

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IS A GAME THE RIGHT ...

Next Article

THERE IS NO MULTICULTURALISM

RELATED POSTS



THE ATOMIZATION TRAP

By Nick Land - June 6, 2017

UN[illegible] VU[illegible]VA

By Diana Fleischman - April 24, 2018 -

COVID-911

Cody Wilson - April 16, 2020

COVID-911

Cody Wilson - April 16, 2020

ARCHIVES

- November 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019
- November 2019
- October 2019
- September 2019
- August 2019
- July 2019
- June 2019
- May 2019
- April 2019
- March 2019
- February 2019
- January 2019
- December 2018
- November 2018
- October 2018
- September 2018
- August 2018
- July 2018
- June 2018
- May 2018
- April 2018
- March 2018
- February 2018
- January 2018
- December 2017
- November 2017
- October 2017
- September 2017
- August 2017
- July 2017
- June 2017
- May 2017

SOCIAL MEDIA

© Jacobite 2017

https://web.archive.org/web/20220517112256/https://jacobitemag.com/2017/06/20/modernitys-fertility-problem/[3/26/2023 11:01:33 AM]